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For Immediate Release

US 23 Heritage Route Awarded National Scenic Byways Grant

The US 23 Heritage Route has been awarded \$147,186 from the National Scenic Byways Program to implement an interpretive program for the counties which are part of the route including Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Alpena, Alcona, Iosco and Arenac. The funding goes to the Northeast Michigan Council of Governments which provides staffing to the US 23 Heritage Route program. The Scenic Byways grant will be used to implement the following items:

1. Identify and compile information on the key assets along the route including the collection of historical stories and photos.
2. Development of interpretive information including criteria for selection and data gathering. Interpretive information will cover arts, culture, and history; natural resources; and active recreation.
3. Using the interpretive information, several types of large format tourism maps will be developed. A map displaying interpretive information of the entire Heritage Route will be developed in addition to maps displaying more detailed interpretive information of each county area. Also, themed tourism maps will be developed which will each focus on a subject area including a route-long eco-tourism map, a biking and hiking tour map, a cultural tour map, and a historic tour map.
4. A US 23 "route atlas" will be developed in book format which will provide all of the interpretive information in one document on a mile by mile basis.
5. With this grant funding, the already successful tourism website www.us23heritageroute.org will be even further enhanced. The current website is a one-stop shop for the tourist in coastal northeast Michigan where they can use an interactive map to select the types of things they would like to do. It also has a "Plan Your Trip" feature where a tourist can create their own itinerary. The new enhancements will include an interactive component where visitors can read the stories of the coastal area, watch videos, leave their own stories, and also download pre-set tours to their GPS units.

This grant will complement the efforts of the US 23 Heritage Route Teams which are currently working with Denise Cline from NEMCOG and professional filmmakers Anne & Brian Belanger toward the production of mini-documentaries which will be downloadable from the website. In addition, the groups are planning to make those videos and written stories available to the traveler in route through mobile devices and a US 23 app for Smartphones. All of these print and web-based tourism resources are being done in conjunction with the Sunrise Coast participation in the Pure Michigan program.

The US 23 program involves teams of local volunteers up and down the coast as well as participation from MDOT, MDNR, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, US Forest Service, MSU Extension, Sea Grant, and local governments and agencies. Denise Cline, from NEMCOG, coordinates the program and provides staff support. The program is made possible by the annual funding NEMCOG receives from MDOT. The US 23 Heritage Route program has become a comprehensive tourism resource aimed at showcasing coastal northeast Michigan. The addition of the National Scenic Byway grant to the funding provided by MDOT will make this already successful tourism program into something that northeast Michigan can be proud of. “Our goal is to show the potential visitor what a spectacular area the northeast Michigan coast is to visit. We are succeeding in showing the visitor that the Heritage Route is so much more than just a road – it’s the pathway to all that the Sunrise Coast has to offer!” says Cline.